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Maxim Voronov

Teacher's College, Columbia University

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Should Critical Management Studies and Organization Development Collaborate? Invitation to a Contemplation

[MAXIM VORONOV](#)

Teachers College, Columbia University

In this article, the author argues that despite important differences between Critical Management Studies (CMS) and Organization Development (OD), there is enough common ground to make a dialogue worthwhile for both fields and for management practice. The author outlines some major "objectives" of each field, noting some important but frequently overlooked similarities and complementarities between them. Power and empowerment are offered as examples of focal topics around which the two disciplines could have a productive discussion, suggesting that such an exchange would help CMS' important insights about power to have more of an impact on organizational practice while enhancing OD's ability to tackle issues of power, domination, and politics. Such a conversation can eventually result in improved management practice –more mindful of issues of power and domination-with benefits for both organizational performance and employees' well-being.

Keywords: Critical management studies; Organization development; Power; Politics, Organization change

In this paper I attempt to elaborate on the argument, heard with increasing frequency in various journals and books, that the field of critical management studies (CMS) should make a more concerted effort to make more of an impact beyond the "ivory towers" (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Reynolds and Russ, 2004; Voronov and Coleman, 2003; Watson, 2001). I suggest that one (but certainly not only) feasible strategy for advancing this goal is to engage in a dialogue with the field of organization development. Although the two fields currently have virtually no interaction with one another, it appears that they have important complementarities and shared interests. CMS offers sophisticated insights about power and disempowerment that are rarely making impact on organizational practice, while OD has developed a great many effective approaches for bringing about organizational change but has been somewhat reluctant to tackle issues of power, domination, and politics. Furthermore, CMS insights about power could greatly improve management practice in a variety of domains, including strategizing and organizational learning (Voronov and Yorks, 2005) and facilitating negotiation between various stakeholders (Deetz, 1995), among others. OD interventions mindful of such insights about power might be better able to facilitate such an awareness in clients, thereby facilitating the above mentioned improvements in management practice.

I attempt to make a case for the need to facilitate an exchange of ideas between the fields of Critical Management Studies (CMS) and Organization Development (OD) by showing that despite important differences, there is enough common ground to make such an exchange worthwhile for both fields.

I start by outlining some major "objectives" of each field and then attempt to note the similarities as well as the complementarities between them. I then suggest that the issue of power and em-

powerment is an example of an issue around which the two fields could have a fruitful exchange. Outcomes of such a dialogue are likely to result in the field of OD becoming more mindful of issues of power and domination and better able to humanize workplaces and to navigate the political terrain, while CMS becoming more “applied” and better equipped to impact organizational practice. Finally, such a dialogue may over time lead to the emergence of novel management practices – more in tune with the ideals of both fields – that are more ethical, socially responsible and sustainable.

This paper is an outcome of my and my collaborators’ ongoing attempts to build a bridge between the world of CMS research and organizational practice. As such, it is not an authoritative guide to integrating two highly distinctive fields but an attempt to invite further dialogue and contemplation.¹

OD and CMS as Disciplines

In this section I provide brief sketches of OD and CMS as fields of practice. The sketches may be caricature-like because of the extremely heterogeneous nature of both of the fields. I do not aim to provide thorough reviews of either field, but to merely highlight certain salient feature of each, particularly those that appear relevant in establishing a common ground between them and in making the case for the benefits of collaboration.

OD and Its Objectives

OD is different from other forms of organizational consulting in several ways. First is the dual importance placed on both people and organizational effectiveness, as opposed to the automatic privileging of financial markers. Second, OD and its repertoire is informed by behavioral science. Third, the consultant is expected to work jointly with the client to design and implement interventions.

According to Church, Waclawski, and Seigel (1999), “Organization development is a field based on values—promoting positive humanistically oriented large-system change in organizations—plain and simple” (p. 49). In keeping with the humanistic values that underpin OD, commentators on the field commonly emphasize the dual concern for the well-being of organizations as well as the well-being of the people who work there (e.g., Argyris, 1957; Burke, 1994; Waclawski and Church, 2002a).

There is not always an agreement as to the relative importance of human needs as opposed to organizational performance. In their seminal article on OD values, Tannenbaum and Davis (1969) observe the therapeutic nature of successful OD interventions. They note that such interventions focus on breaking through inter-personal and organizational barriers that stifle human growth and keep people from realizing their potential. On the other hand, Bennis (1969) is more focused on the coupling of the humanistic change with meeting the organization’s objectives, and Stephenson (1975) accuses OD of being focused on human development to the point of losing the focus on organization development. Kahn (1974) cautions OD practitioners against excessive reliance on the process versus structure dichotomy, as this may lead them to overempha-

size the process interventions and to ignore the needed structural interventions. Pages (1971) even goes as far as suggesting that some OD interventions designed to overcome defensive routines can engender a different kind of defensive routines and submission to authority. Nonetheless, in its attention to human needs OD is distinct from those forms of consulting that focus exclusively on organizations' financial performance.

OD is based on behavioral science research. Burke (1994) credits humanist writers, such as Maslow, Herzberg, Lawler, Argyris, Bion, and Lewin for the intellectual underpinnings of OD. The field has over the decades developed a great variety of techniques and interventions based on research in behavioral sciences, including process consultation, group dynamics, survey feedback, large-scale interventions, and appreciative inquiry (see Waclawski and Church, 2002b and French and Bell, 1999 for recent discussions of OD's repertoire). A number of OD writers have emphasized the importance of systemic, rather than individual and group change (Burke, 1994; Kahn, 1974; Katz and Kahn, 1966, 1978). It needs to be noted, however, that the OD community has been under increased pressure to demonstrate the contribution of various initiatives to the bottom line (Cady and Lewis, 2002; Church, Waclawski, and Berr, 2002), and the focus is, at least to some extent, shifting from human input to the business results (McLean and DeVogel, 2002). This pressure is arguably shaping the repertoire, with certain "harder" and more quantitative approaches, such as survey feedback and multi-source feedback, becoming increasingly prominent, while the "softer" approaches, such as group dynamics, apparently losing some of their appeal.

OD interventions are conceived as joint collaborations between consultants and clients (Bennis, 1969). Unlike the forms of consultation in which consultants solve clients' problems or offer them solutions without providing assistance with implementation, OD consultants are expected to work jointly with their clients throughout the process of diagnosing the "problem," designing a solution, implementing it, and assessing its impact (Schein, 1988).

CMS and Its Objectives

It is particularly difficult to provide a coherent overview or summary of Critical Management Studies as a field of practice (Fournier and Grey, 2000), as the following quote from the web site of the 4th International Conference of Critical Management Studies illustrates,

Critical Management Studies addresses a wide range of issues that extend from diversity to globalization, from labour process to philosophy, from technology to sexuality and gender. It interrogates established agendas and strives to move beyond them. Contributions from heterodox standpoints are encouraged: marxism, feminism, environmentalism, labour process theory, post-structuralism, post-colonialism, post-development theory, queer theory, critical realism. ...

The task of providing a unified overview of CMS is further complicated by unwillingness of some CMS scholars to be classified under the rubric of CMS and the conflicts between some "camps" that make up CMS, such as critical theory and postmodernism and neo-Marxism and

post-structuralism (see Alvesson and Deetz, 1999 and Fournier and Grey, 2000 for further discussions). Furthermore, there are some distinctions between the field of CMS and the CMS interest group of the Academy of Management, with a significant contingent of CMS scholars refusing to be affiliated with the interest group. As a result, each commentator inevitably makes choices as to the aspects of CMS s/he highlights while overlooking others. The choice made in this paper is to present a brief and very partial sketch of CMS or more precisely the “critical postmodern” (to use Boje and Rosile’s, 2001 term) wing of CMS. This is more or less consistent with Alvesson and Deetz’ (2000), and Boje and Rosile’s (2001) discussions and is due to my personal interest in the field, which is less in advancing CMS as a scholarly enterprise and more in selectively drawing on it to improve organizational practice.

Scholars, whose work has been broadly classified as CMS, have sought to challenge the assumption that management is a neutral and value-free activity concerned with attaining the instrumental goals of organizations that serve a common good. According to the domain statement of the Critical Management Studies Interest Group of the Academy of Management,

We observe that management of the modern firm (and often of other types of organizations) is guided primarily by the interests of shareholders and other elites. We are critical of the notion that the pursuit of profitability will automatically satisfy society's broader interests. Such a system extracts unacceptably high social and environmental costs for whatever progress it offers. We believe that other priorities, such as justice, community, human development, and ecological balance, should be brought to bear on the governance of economic and other human activity.

Relatedly, Deetz (1992a, 1995) has argued for the need to view corporate organizations as political arenas and the recognition of the pervasive public effects of their decisions and actions that often surpass the impact of those made by governmental agencies. CMS is concerned with the “questioning of taken-for-granted, both about practice and its social and institutional context.... Identifying and questioning both purposes, and conflicts of power and interest” (Reynolds, 1998, p. 192). It aims to expose and reform the mundane and frequently unnoticed practices that privilege some groups (and individuals) at the expense of others (e.g., many seemingly neutral aspects of engineering work tend to privilege men over women, see Fletcher, 1999). Although human relations approaches to management, that serve as the foundation of OD also aspire to foster more fair organizational practices, they generally focus on curbing more blatant abuses and have paid less attention to the taken-for-granted assumptions of management (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Alvesson and Willmott, 1996; Deetz, 1995).

CMS’s critique targets not only managers and those who create and sustain the kinds of practices that CMS proponents seek to expose and reform but also much of conventional management research. Critical researchers have pointed out that organizational science (including organizational behavior, strategic management, human resources management, and so on) tends to take the managerial point of view (Frost, 1980; Nord, 1977) and to pay insufficient attention to the socio-economic conditions within which organizations function (Nord, 1974). The aim of such research often is to help managers attain their goals, such as overcoming resistance to change or

attaining maximum productivity, more easily, but there often is a lack of mindfulness to the potentially detrimental impact of these prerogatives on other organizational stakeholders (Deetz, 1992a, 1995). The needs of employees (including white-collar employees) are considered only from an instrumental perspective and within a predetermined structure. Thus, it is argued that many “conventional” organizational researchers tend to assume the universality of elite and managerial interests (Nord and Jermier, 1994). Furthermore, non-CMS organizational scholars are often criticized for assuming the privileged position of “objective” and disinterested purveyors of pure knowledge while in reality manufacturing knowledge that is political and serves managerial interests (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992, 1996).

Some Commonalities Between CMS and OD

Although there are significant philosophical and practical differences between CMS and OD, I believe that there are frequently overlooked similarities between them as well. In this section I would like to highlight the similarities that I find most salient and that appear to offer a necessary common ground to facilitate a greater exchange of ideas. Both are concerned with change, are humanistic in nature and have both been marginalized by the emphasis on shareholder value.

Focus on change. Both OD and CMS are concerned with research and/or practice of facilitating or leading change. There are clear philosophical differences, as will be discussed below, as to the purpose of change initiatives as well as of the conception of the “end-product” of these initiatives. For example, OD tends to focus on organizational change within a given organizational and societal context, whereas CMS scholars tend to favor socio-political transformation. Also, while OD practitioners strive for improved bottom line and better conditions for employees, CMS scholars are much more interested in the well-being of people working in organizations as well as those impacted by the organizations. However, a great many CMS scholars do not view profits and people’s needs as inherently in opposition (e.g., Boje, 2004; Deetz, 1995), and there is evidence that at its foundation OD was more radical and social change oriented than it has become (Cooke, 1999, 2004; Tannenbaum and Davis, 1969). In addition, as alluded to earlier, the field of OD consists of both researchers and practitioners, whereas CMS is comprised almost entirely of scholars. This may further influence the divergence of thinking on change. Nonetheless, the focus on change, broadly conceived, and on examining obstacles to change may provide important common ground to facilitate an exchange of ideas.

Emancipatory interest. Another crucial common thread between OD and CMS is the desire to humanize work places and to create more democratic institutions. The emancipatory interest, to use Connell and Nord’s (1996) term, which is common to advocates of both approaches can be used as a focal point around which ideas are exchanged. Emancipatory interest “is reflected in concerns for helping people individually and/or collectively to exercise greater control over their own outcomes and destinies” (Connell and Nord, 1996, p. 411). Again, there are differences to be acknowledged. OD tends to pursue emancipatory interest on a more micro-scale, within a given organizational context, whereas CMS scholars often focus on societal transformation in pursuit of emancipatory interest. However, a number of noted CMS scholars are more open to the idea of pursuit of emancipatory interest at more micro or even individual level (e.g., Alves-

son and Willmott, 1996; Covaleski, Dirsmith, Heian, and Samuel, 1998), and some of OD's founding fathers were more concerned with societal transformation (Cooke, 1999, 2003).

Common marginalization. Although OD has tended to be less inclined to criticize modern organizations than CMS, it can be argued that both OD and CMS have been marginalized by the current drive toward shareholder value maximization and perhaps even by the shareholder model of the firm more generally.² It is no secret that the shareholder model of the firm is in opposition to the emancipatory values of CMS, but it is less frequently noted that it is also a threat to OD. It is not my intention to engage in the shareholder-model/stakeholder-model debate. Instead, I offer a tentative "hypothesis" that the emphasis on the short-term stock performance has been just as detrimental to the promulgation of many of OD's favorite ideas as to those of CMS. For instance, Kennedy (2000) points out that the focus on short-term stock performance has, among other things, has led to the decreased attention to investing in and developing employees (see also Simons, Mintzberg, and Basu, 2002). This is not only contradictory to both OD's and CMS's ideals but is also detrimental to the employment of OD consultants. These have become perceived as increasingly less useful than the management consultants, who appear to be more effective at favorably positioning themselves in the current environment (LeTrent-Jones, 2001).

In considering the three commonalities discussed above, one may understandably suggest that they are painted so generally, as to become agreeable—in principle—to most social scientists, even though they would still disagree on the ends for getting there. This level of generality is fully intended. Nord and Connell (1993, also Connell and Nord, 1996) note the tendency among organizational scholars (and I would add practitioners to this list) to focus on the differences, thereby obscuring important similarities. I seek to reverse that in the case of OD and CMS. The aim of this paper is to encourage both sides, metaphorically speaking, to sit down and listen to one another. Given the diverse histories, purposes, and vocabularies of the two disciplines, bringing them to the metaphorical table may indeed require a great deal of glossing over potentially contentious issues until a shared understanding can be established to be used as a foundation for constructively discussing these points of contention.

In the previous sections I have attempted to build some common ground between CMS and OD. In the following sections I provide an example of a potential focal issue that the two fields can use for building bridges.

The Importance of Power in OD Interventions

In this section I suggest that a key topic that could be fruitfully discussed by proponents of OD and of CMS is the issue of power in organizational change interventions. This topic is at the heart of much of CMS research but is something that many OD practitioners do not feel comfortable tackling (Marshak, 2001). At the same time, despite the plethora of research on power and organizational change by CMS scholars, their work has rarely been utilized (Voronov and Coleman, 2003).

Whenever considering power, OD consultants appear to have to a large extent focused on what Coleman and Voronov (2003) call secondary power or overt exercise of power and purposeful

political behavior in a given context. On the other hand, insufficient attention has been paid to what they call primary power – the socio-historical processes of reality construction and meaning making that shape people’s understanding of themselves, others, and of their world; these are the processes that locate different groups and individuals in positions of differential influence (e.g., employers vs. employees, whites vs. blacks, men vs. women, finance vs. HR, U.S. headquarters vs. overseas office). It seems that a major challenge for OD is to develop a deeper appreciation of the way primary power frames all aspects of OD interventions (see also Hardy and Redivo, 1994), and CMS can provide a number of insights that can be useful here.

Two Faces of Power

The literature on power in organization studies is immense, and a glance at it reveals that many writers mean different things when discussing power (Coleman and Voronov, 2003; Hardy and Clegg, 1999). Specifically, more “conventional” scholars tend to focus on the surface manifestations of power and politics, whereas critical scholars tend to focus on the systemic and societal aspects of the phenomenon. Coleman and Voronov (2003; Voronov and Coleman, 2003) offer the distinction between secondary and primary power as a heuristic to illuminate the distinction between surface power and politics that have received some attention in organizational learning and strategy literatures and the more systemic/cultural/ideological power that has been largely neglected. These are not theoretical constructs but rather loose heuristic categories that highlight two important aspects of the phenomena thus allowing us to discuss power generally at a meta-theoretical level with some clarity. However, these categories do not allow us to make concrete theoretical links or propositions that are beyond the scope of this paper.

Secondary power. Secondary power refers to the exercise of power in the conventional sense—the ability to get one’s goals met (French and Raven, 1959) often through managing or manipulating power-dependency relationships (Thompson, 1967). This can take a coercive or positive form (Coleman and Voronov, 2003; Deutsch, 1973; French and Raven, 1959; Oshry, 1992). However, exercising secondary power involves working in a domain that already has been largely defined. Thus, the various strategies that a manager may use to obtain employees’ compliance or commitment would constitute secondary power. The manager indeed has a choice as to whether to attempt to sell her or his ideas to the employees or to force them to obey. However, it is primary power, which we discuss next, that has made entertaining these options possible.

Primary power. Primary power refers to the socio-historical process of reality construction. This is the process by which our sense of reality, as we know it, is constructed. As Chia (2000) writes,

Social objects and phenomena such as ‘the organization’, ‘the economy’, ‘the market’ or even ‘stakeholders’ or ‘the weather’, do not have a straightforward and unproblematic existence independent of our discursively-shaped understandings. Instead, they have to be forcibly carved out of the undifferentiated flux of raw experience and conceptually fixed and labeled so that they can become the common currency for communicational ex-

changes. Modern social reality, with its all-too-familiar features, has to be continually constructed and sustained through such aggregative discursive acts of reality-construction (p. 513).

Thus, primary power defines the domain. It is not to be seen simplistically as either negative or positive, because it both enables and limits our understanding of the world and our reflexive experience of ourselves (Deetz, 1992b). Hence, our reason, knowledge, and sensemaking are inextricably bound up with power.

A manager is able to give orders and to expect them to be followed because the role of a manager has been historically constructed so as to include notions of order giving. It is important to recognize that the various sources of power (e.g., French and Raven, 1959) are not concrete but socially constructed. “Legitimacy,” for example is not objective but is created through management of meaning, and thus legitimacy requires power to be demonstrated (Hardy and Phillips, 1998). Only after the domain has been defined does it become possible for power as conceived of in conventional theories to be exercised (Hardy, Palmer, and Phillips, 2000).

Primary power both opens and constrains the possibilities for exercising secondary power. Secondary power can be seen as expressing and reproducing primary power relations. Individuals' identities are constituted by primary power, and these identities determine how much secondary power these individuals can exercise and how they can exercise it. However, as the work of Smith (1982), Alderfer (1987), Oshry (1992), Deetz (1992a) and Weick (1979, 1995) remind us, we should not separate the structure from the individuals that enact it. Hence, primary power is reproduced or transformed through the mundane behavior of organizational members over time as well as through their overt political behavior.

Recognizing the Importance of Primary Power in OD Interventions

In this section I focus on the challenge of OD identified by Marshak (2001)—the frequent “ambivalence or even antagonism toward power” on the part of many OD consultants (p. 35). To be sure, a number of OD scholars and practitioners have highlighted the importance of power and politics in organizations (e.g., Alderfer, 1987; Schein, 1999; Smith, 1982). However, as Burke (2002) suggests, there remains a need for a better understanding of power. Writers have almost exclusively focused on purposeful political behavior and observable aspects of power, while neglecting the importance of hegemony (Boje, 2004) and more systemic, societal and ideological aspects of power (Hardy and Redivo, 1994). Having presented the heuristics of primary and secondary power, I now attempt to highlight the importance of primary power in OD interventions.

Primary power and organizational health. The stated aim of OD is to improve organizational effectiveness while improving the lives of people who work in a particular organization. However, when one is diagnosing organizational problems and defining the desired outcomes, there is often a tendency to universalize the values and interests of the managers (Brief, 2000; Frost, 1980; Nord, 1977; Woodworth, 1981, 1982; Zickar, 2004). The dual focus can be severely compromised, when the intervention is allowed to lead to an outcome that benefits the management's

goals at the expense of the employees (Driver, 2003). It is also important to note that the reverse is also possible, where the failure to acknowledge the legitimacy of the conflict between the goals of employees and the organization leads to a potential loss of learning opportunities and creative solutions of benefit to both the employees and the organization (Deetz, 1998; Voronov and Yorks, 2005). Thus, the organizational outcomes may also suffer. OD interventions not mindful of such a conflict then are likely to fail to satisfy employees, managers, or both.

Primary power, in this case, operates through the consultants' mental models that conceive organizations as cohesive units driven by a shared interest, consistent with managerial objectives, rather than as loose confederations of interest groups with potentially competing interests (Deetz, 1992a). Primary power also operates through disciplinary assumptions about the nature of organizations. The psychological nature of OD makes OD consultants less likely than Industrial Relations proponents to recognize the inherent power disparities and class conflict in organizations (Zickar, 2004).

Thus, assuming that what is best for the managers is best for the organization may easily put the consultant on the side of one stakeholder group against another (Woodworth, 1981, 1982). Being mindful of primary power can help OD consultants avoid inadvertently becoming "servants of power," to use Baritz' (1960) expression. Such mindfulness is likely to be important to managers, as well, as it would raise their awareness of the importance of facilitating a negotiation of multiple interests in order to attain organizational outcomes (Watson, 2003).

Primary power and client identification. It is not controversial to suggest that power is central to the consultant-client relationship. I would like to suggest, however, that it is important to reflect not only upon the power in the relationship but also on the role of primary power in constituting the relationship, including the significance of the notion of the "client" in general, and whom the consultant designates as the client. A number of influential commentators (e.g., Burke, 1994; Schein, 1997) have noted the challenge of identifying whom the consultant should be serving. Schein (1997) illustrates the client-identification challenge by suggesting six client-types that the consultant needs to consider: contact clients (those who make the initial contact), intermediate clients (those who get involved in various activities at various points during the project's lifetime), primary clients (those who own the problem and typically pay the bills), unwitting clients (those who will be impacted by interventions but do not know it), indirect clients (those who will be affected but are unknown to the consultant), and ultimate clients (the community, the total organization, or another group whose welfare must be considered).

However, the organizational health models that do not account for incompatible or conflicting but legitimate interests may inhibit the recognition of unwitting, indirect, and ultimate clients. Furthermore, the overlooked interest groups are likely to resist the change initiative (e.g., Collinson, 1994), thus potentially thwarting the accomplishment of the business objectives the intervention is intended to accomplish.

Some commentators have noticed this tendency of OD to take the management's side while overlooking other interest groups. Woodworth (1981) compares OD consultants to CIA operatives "in foreign countries: they investigate, make recommendations, and help as the local gov-

ernment sees fit” (p. 58). Similar observations have been made by Nord (1977) and Zickar (2004) on the field of industrial-organizational psychology, in which many OD consultants are trained. Primary power operates through the implicit models of who the client is and whose interests should be seen as legitimate. Furthermore, it is important to note that primary power also operates through the cultural assumptions about the legitimacy of various interests, such as organized labor. Zickar (2004), for instance, notes that Europeans are more likely than Americans to see organized labor as legitimate (and labor is stronger in Europe than in the United States), which in turn leads European industrial-organizational psychology to be more pro-labor than its American counterpart. Similarly, Mintzberg (1983) notes that the strong American cultural belief in free enterprise complicates attempts at workplace democracy. Yet another cultural factor that may contribute to the increased managerialism of OD is the continuing growth of prestige of business and business skills and credentials in the contemporary society (LeTrent-Jones, 2001). Critical reflections on the relationship between OD consultants and various interest groups in organizations are quite rare, with Woodworth (1981, 1982) offering some of the most sustained critiques.

Primary power and the facilitation of change. OD interventions are frequently described as challenging and anxiety-provoking for organizational members. However, they are believed to be deployed in service of improving organizational health. Yet, as Schein (1999) notes,

In the typical organizational context the new ways of working that are touted as culture changes are usually seen as necessary for organizational survival and growth so, paradoxically, the required generative learning process is coercively imposed on most of the managers and employees which puts them in a situation comparable to the prisoner in a political prison (p. 169)

Similarly, in his critique of early sensitivity training or T-groups (a popular tool in OD repertoire), Pages (1971) notes that such techniques can engender obedience to authority and acceptance of hierarchies. Schein (1999) also suggests that the differentiation between “brainwashing” and “culture change” depends ultimately on whether the outcome is seen as deplorable or desirable. Whether or not the outcome is seen as desirable, however, is to a large extent dependent on the consultants’ models of organizational health, that, as discussed above, tend to be infused with managerialist assumptions.

To summarize, I suggest that OD needs to pay more attention to power – not only in the context of a particular intervention, but also to the way primary power may inform the way organizational health is conceptualized, legitimacy is bestowed upon particular interest groups, and interventions are legitimized. Collinson (1994) and Knights and McCabe (2000) describe arguably not-unusual instances of culture-change initiatives that did not succeed due to the failure by those responsible for facilitating change to grasp the importance of primary power. The importance of primary power was recognized in these studies, because the authors knew to look for it. Unfortunately, those facilitating the initiatives described did not.

I suggest, therefore, that an intellectual exchange between CMS and OD proponents can benefit not only CMS scholars, but also OD practitioners and researchers, since CMS offers a number of insights about power that OD practitioners and researchers might find useful. The exchange will also likely benefit managers who receive OD consultation, as OD consultants attuned to dynamics of primary power will be better equipped to manage such dynamics for both the benefit of the organization and the people who work there.

Building Philosophical Bridges Between OD and CMS

Having offered the importance of power in organizational change intervention as a potential focal topic that can be used to build bridges between OD and CMS, we delve into the philosophical differences between the two fields that need to be managed in order to facilitate such a conversation. Although both OD and CMS are concerned with improving the lives of people in organizations, they conceive of these improvements in different ways. In this section I review the notions of empowerment and emancipation that have served as organizing ideals for OD and CMS, respectively, and suggest how they may be re-conceptualized in a way that better facilitates an exchange of ideas between OD and CMS.

Empowerment

OD is to a large extent organized around the notion of empowerment. “Empowerment” is used rather broadly in this context as an overarching goal of various human relations influenced human resources initiatives, including employee empowerment, the learning organization, management by objectives (MBO), and various teamworking arrangements, such as total quality management (TQM).

Rooted in the work of Maslow, Herzberg, Likert, Mayo, Follett, and others, the empowerment discourse revolves around providing greater autonomy to employees and allowing them greater control of the work process. The focus is largely on generating the “feeling or belief that a person can direct the organization toward desired performance ends” (Boje and Rosile, 2001, p. 93). This is expected to be accomplished by offering employees more discretion over the work related activities, trusting them, and sharing more information with them (Cunningham and Hyman, 1999). Empowered employees are expected to be more committed to the goals of the organization (Cunningham and Hyman, 1999), to discipline (Claydon and Doyle, 1996), and to learn and to improve themselves on behalf of the organization (Driver, 2002).

Returning to the earlier discussion of power, the ideal of empowerment is rooted in assumptions about power that corresponds to secondary power (Hardy and Leiba-O’Sullivan, 1998). The focus is on slight structural changes that do not involve a critical reflection on ideologies or beliefs that frame organizational life, such as who should be in charge, set the agenda, design reward systems, determine relevant values, and so on. The intention is to change the way people do their work within a predefined organizational reality.

Limitations of Empowerment

Over the years, a number of commentators have questioned the premises and feasibility of the notion of empowerment. Schein (1999), for example, compares empowerment initiatives to brainwashing of American prisoners of war by the Chinese during the Korean War. The coercive potential of such initiatives have been noted by a number of other scholars as well (e.g., Barker, 1993; Driver, 2002; Marsick and Watkins, 1999). As Deetz (1998) suggests, “When employees strategize their own subordination for the sake of private gains, they surrender whatever power they have to change their conditions and have the corporate experience better fulfill their needs” (p. 164). It is argued that the empowerment initiatives can have a paradoxically disempowering effect because the employee perspective is not taken seriously (Frost, 1980; Woodworth, 1981, 1982) and there is not enough consideration of how the structural and institutional arrangements systematically reproduce disempowering and undemocratic arrangements (Coopey, 1998; Nord, 1977). From a pragmatic business perspective success of empowerment initiatives can be hindered by employee resistance (e.g., Collinson, 1994; Knights and McCabe, 2000; McCabe, 2000; 2002), inadequate training (Cunningham and Hyman, 1999), lack of trust toward employees (Coopey, 1998; Claydon and Doyle, 1996), and so on.

Emancipation

Emancipation, broadly defined, is the organizing goal of CMS. As with empowerment, I use “emancipation” as a broad label that subsumes a number of diverse and potentially conflicting approaches. I use the term as a generic category for various radical humanist, post-structuralist-feminist, neo-Marxist, labour-process, and postmodern approaches to studying and intervening in organizations. While recognizing important and significant differences between and within a number of these perspectives, I align myself with those that suggest that these approaches should be seen as complimentary (e.g., Alvesson and Deetz, 2000, ch. 4; Voronov and Coleman, 2003; Lawrence and Phillips, 1998).

Rooted in the work of Adorno, Habermas, Marcuse, Foucault, Derrida, and others, emancipation “refers to the process of separation from constraining modes of thinking or acting that limit perception of and action toward realizing alternative possibilities” (Thomas, 1993, p. 4). It is a process of wrestling with oppressive ideologies, traditions and assumptions that limit opportunities for autonomy and self-determination (Alvesson, 1996). Emancipation is not something bestowed from above on those below but a potentially painful struggle and resistance against systems of domination that are often intertwined with seemingly neutral religious, managerial or scientific discourses (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992, 1996; Mumby, 1988). The focus here is typically on the conflicts between labor and management, the silencing of concerns of women and racial minorities (Martin, 2002), and more recently, self subordination at all levels of organization, including “elites,” such as managers and knowledge workers (e.g., Deetz, 1992a, 1995, 1998; Covaleski, Dirsmith, Heian, and Samuel, 1998) and men (e.g., Mumby, 1998).

In regard to power, the focus of emancipation is on transforming primary power relations. It is directly concerned with challenging oppressive ideologies, systems of beliefs, and societal structures.

Limitations of Emancipation

The ideal of emancipation has its own share of difficulties that can also be categorized into conceptual and pragmatic. It can be viewed as paradoxical, in that, if we accept the premise that emancipation cannot be given by an authority, then the researcher or consultant could easily be violating the very premise of emancipation, should s/he attempt to actively liberate people from “false authorities” by taking on the authority to guide them in a particular direction (Alvesson, 1996). The critical question then becomes: How to emancipate those who do not believe they are not emancipated or do not wish to be emancipated? From a more pragmatic perspective, it is sometimes difficult to demonstrate the benefits of emancipation to organizational members in light of their mundane concerns. The other critical question then is: How can emancipatory agenda be presented in a way that would help the audience accept it?³

Empowerment and Emancipation as Metaphors

Above I have suggested that a critical examination of both empowerment and emancipation reveals them to be a great deal more problematic in implementation and significantly less unambiguously “good” than they may appear at first glance. I suggest that empowerment and emancipation should be viewed as metaphors in service of emancipatory interest, rather than as fixed goals. As common with metaphors, they provide vivid but somewhat idealized images of the desired “new” workplaces. As suggested in the previous section, putting both ideals into practice is highly problematic if not impossible. Holding on too rigidly to either metaphor may lead us to overlook aspects of organizational life, solutions, alternatives, and opportunities that may be utilized to advance our shared emancipatory interest. Excessive focus on the differences between proponents of emancipation and empowerment, such as epistemologies, scientific pursuits versus “practical” concerns, research methods and preferred interventions, and so on, can obscure the important similarities and prevent potentially mutually beneficial exchanges of ideas (Connell and Nord, 1996; Nord and Connell, 1993).

Micro-Emancipation as an Alternative Metaphor

I suggest that we need a new metaphor that has the potential to avoid the pitfalls of “empowerment” and “emancipation” metaphors but integrates important aspects of both. Alvesson and Willmott’s (1996, p. 172) notion of micro-emancipation, which emphasizes “partial, temporary movements that break away from diverse forms of oppression, rather than successive moves towards a predetermined state of liberation,” may be such a metaphor. Adapting this metaphor allows us to avoid the “either/or” thinking and utopian images frequently associated with the more traditional conception of emancipation. The micro-emancipation metaphor alerts us to the ambiguity inherent in organizational life. According to Deetz (1998),

The processes of enablement and constraint arise together; one cannot exist without the other. So the point of looking at these technologies is not to argue for some form of autonomy or freedom through the critique of these constraints. Rather, the attempt is to resist the freezing and generalization

of constraints and to ultimately reclaim social actor efficacy in working within these arbitrary bounds to make more satisfying choices (pp. 152-153).

This view demands a more mindful or reflexive understanding of organizational life. The emancipatory project is seen as an endless process of uncovering and wrestling with different aspects of systems of dominations and carving out greater space for critical reflection (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996). In addition, it is sometimes easy to overlook the “loopholes” in the operations of power techniques. These can be viewed as one manifestation of microemancipatory processes “in which attention is focused on concrete activities, forms, and techniques that offer themselves not only as means of control, but also as vehicles for liberation” (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992, p. 446; see also Nord and Jermier, 1994). Sometimes, managerial initiatives aimed at increasing cultural control “trigger suspicion, resistance, and critical reflections” (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992, p. 446).

This type of response is illustrated by Collinson’s (1994) study, in which he reports management’s unsuccessful attempts to introduce the corporate culture campaign at a British automobile manufacturing plant. Victimized by the management’s previous innovations, the shopfloor workers were determined to resist the change initiative. Their prior experience at the plant had been one of comodification and dehumanization, and the change initiative was received with a great deal of distrust.

The study showcases several features that make it a helpful illustration of micro-emancipatory processes. First, the introduction of the change initiative stimulated critical reflection on the part of the workers. They did not buy into the management’s espoused ideals of the new “flatter” organization and did not allow themselves to adopt the new culture, which would control their worldview. In fact, the study describes the workers’ culture getting infused with various mechanisms of resisting the change initiative. Second, workers resisted adopting some of the key symbols that the management introduced. For example, in the spirit of “flat” organization, workers were encouraged to address managers by their first names and to accept rides from them. However, workers refused to comply and sanctioned those who did. Third, workers appropriated some of the symbols of the new campaign as tools of resistance. For instance, the workers used the company-issued overalls to smuggle pornographic magazines into the plant.

This case is by no means exhausts the possible micro-emancipatory possibilities that may be available at any given organization. Nor does it provide examples of micro-emancipation for managers or more elite knowledge workers (Covaleski et al., 1998 offer examples of that). It is also important not to lose sight of the ambiguity of micro-emancipation in terms of the costs and benefits to those engaging in such activities. For example, Collinson (1994) points out that the various resistance activities in which the workers he studied engaged had some drawbacks, in that by totally disengaging from the change initiative, they potentially missed opportunities to keep themselves informed about the various developments in the plant, some of which they might have been able to influence. In addition, the practices in which the workers engaged most likely look more appealing to CMS scholars than to OD consultants, who would likely interpret them as a sign of a failed intervention. However, this does not have to be the outcome. The re-

sistance practices, such as those described above, could be used by an OD consultant as data illustrating that the culture change initiative is pitting one interest group (management) against another (workers) and could inform the next steps for aligning the two sides' interests more closely. A closer alignment is likely to happen only if the consultant acknowledges both stakeholder groups' interests as legitimate, as will be discussed later.

Although micro-emancipation is a great deal less ambitious or utopian than more traditional visions of emancipation, it is nonetheless dramatically different from empowerment. As with more traditional iterations of emancipation, micro-emancipation—unlike empowerment—cannot be handed down to those with less influence by the benevolent “elites” (Gorz, 1967). Micro-emancipation retains the essential emancipatory elements of individual and collective existential struggles, confronting oppressive ideologies, and resisting oppressive authority.

Micro-emancipation is in some ways reminiscent of Gorz' (1967) notion of non-reformist reform. First, such a reform does not conform to the primacy of preexisting criteria of rationality and efficiency or subject human needs to those criteria. Instead, it asserts human needs as crucial criteria in and of themselves. Second, a non-reformist reform inevitably involves a modification of power relations. Third, it conceives the workers, rather than government or elites as agents of change. Forth, it can be sudden or gradual. The difference between a non-reformist reform and micro-emancipation is that Gorz appears to give primacy to more or less concerted collective action, whereas micro-emancipation can be collective or personal. Furthermore, as Collinson's (1994) case above illustrates, micro-emancipation does not have to be completely rational or strategic.

Arguably the most central “skill” or “competency” for micro-emancipation that should be fostered is critical reflection. Critical reflection is distinct from self-reflection in four ways: 1) it is principally concerned with developing the capacity to question “common sense” assumptions, 2) its focus is social, political and historical rather than individual, 3) it pays particular attention to the analysis of power relations, hierarchies, and privilege, and 4) it is concerned with emancipation and, as such, is ideological (Reynolds, 1998).

Potential Outcomes of the Conversation Between OD and CMS

In this paper I have attempted to bring OD and CMS closer together by highlighting the frequently overlooked similarities and commonalities and presenting the issue of power as an example of a focal issue of mutual interest that can serve as a fruitful discussion topic. In the remainder of this paper I discuss the potential outcomes of the conversation between the two disciplines, OD and CMS, and each of these on management practice.

Outcomes for OD

Perhaps the most obvious positive outcome for OD would be an acquiring of a deeper appreciation of the role of power—especially primary power—in organizational development initiatives. This would help on three fronts. On the humanistic side, a deeper appreciation of primary power would enable OD consultants to be better able to navigate organizational politics and make them

less likely to be inadvertently serving one stakeholder group at the expense of others. On the pragmatic side, by understanding the societal conditions and business trends that currently position OD consultants less favorably in comparison to management consultants (see LeTrent-Jones, 2001, for a discussion), they might develop new language or vocabularies that would more favorably position themselves in the eyes of prospective clients.

OD informed by CMS insights may perhaps be similar to what Woodworth (e.g., 1981, 1982) has advocated for some time, including a greater emphasis on employees' interests and a greater awareness of the socio-political context of OD interventions. Alternatively, the discussion between two fields may produce more forms of organizational consulting. For example, SEAM (Socio-Economic Approach to Management), which draws on economics, auditing and social and technical systems (Boje, 2004), is an example of one such approach.

There may also be negative outcomes for OD—from some writers' perspective—that should be acknowledged. As it is, some commentators argue that OD is too diverse in terms of approaches and needs to work toward establishing more consistent standards for quality (e.g., Church et al., 1999). Adding new perspectives and vocabularies would move the field in the opposite direction.

It should be noted, however, that a greater focus on issues of oppression and social justice in OD should not be viewed as “new wave,” an add-on or any kind of attempt to hijack OD. The founding fathers of OD, such as Lewin and Collier were very concerned with these issues. Thus, it is the process managing OD's history to cleanse it of its leftist roots that should be seen an attempt to change it (Cooke, 1999). In other words, enhancing OD's social justice focus is nothing more than a return to its radical roots.

Outcomes for CMS

There are several potential positive outcomes for CMS. First, its insights may begin to make more impact in organizations, at least along the lines of fostering more micro-emancipation. Second, CMS scholars may be stimulated to generate more actionable insights and to communicate them better (Voronov and Coleman, 2003). These two points can be summarized as increasing CMS' relevance.

Third, partnering with OD consultants may provide more novel research opportunities for CMS scholars in the form of action research or participatory action research. Those modes of research, assuming a partnership between the researcher and the research collaborator/client are in fact more aligned with CMS democratic ideals than conventional modes of research (Voronov and Coleman, 2003) and require striking a balance between researchers' interests and obligations to the research collaborator/client.⁴

There may of course be potential negative outcomes for CMS, as well. For instance, CMS insights might be appropriated by managers or consultants to be used as tools for devising more effective techniques for controlling employees (Nord and Jermier, 1992). There is also a danger

of losing the focus on the emancipatory agenda, of having a dilution of CMS insights, or of drawing of efforts away from more radically transforming societal institutions.

There is a growing dissatisfaction among many CMS scholars (e.g., Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Alvesson and Willmott, 1996; Voronov and Coleman, 2003) with CMS' inability (and perhaps even a lack of desire) to make a concerted effort to impact organizational practice or to take on more active role in transforming organizations and society, rather than limiting itself to critique. Partnering with OD then can offer opportunities for CMS to have more relevance and impact.

Outcomes for Management Practice

It is my hope that collaboration between OD and CMS will eventually result in changed management and organizational practice. First, OD consultation grounded in CMS is compatible with the goals of those attempting to develop action-based learning grounded in CMS (see Reynolds and Vince, 2004). In this case OD, with its emphasis on joint consultant-client action research, would serve as a vehicle for delivering such learning to an organization. Second, a greater awareness of primary power that such a consulting will likely facilitate would enable managers to more effectively manage stakeholder conflict (Deetz, 1995) and carry out crucial organizational practices, such as strategizing (Hardy, 1996), organizational learning (Coopery, 1998), and product innovation (Dougherty and Hardy, 1996). Third, increased critical awareness likely to result from such OD interventions will likely enable managers to make more ethical and socially responsible choices that can have far-reaching effects beyond a particular organization.

Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to make a case for the need to build bridges between CMS and OD. OD interventions may offer an opportunity for CMS insights to be taken up in organizational practice.⁵ At the same time, OD consultants and researchers would be exposed to a variety of insights about power that can prove useful in organizational interventions and in research on organizational change. I believe that such a conversation will result in gradual transformation of management practice. It is in the interests of managers to be aware of the wide-ranging impact of power on organizational life, both as human beings impacted by it and as managers trying to maximize organizational performance. The two facets—personal and professional—are inevitably related (Watson, 2003). Power relations are implicated in the construction of managerial identities (e.g., Reynolds and Vince, 2004). Furthermore, managers would greatly benefit from understanding how power impacts a variety of the activities in which they engage, such as strategizing, organizational learning, product innovation, negotiation, to name just a few.

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NOTES

¹ It is important to note upfront that I do not aim to “convert” those who are ideologically opposed to the idea of collaboration between CMS and OD. For example, I am not targeting those OD practitioners who believe that the humanist values of OD are outdated and no longer have a place alongside of the drive to improve the bottom line.

Nor am I aiming to change the minds of those CMS scholars who are ideologically opposed to the idea of collaborating with managers or believe that there can be no coexistence between profits and well-being of employees. In other words, I am addressing those who are more ideologically open to explore the feasibility of such a collaboration.

² I would like to acknowledge Lyle Yorks for this very helpful insight.

³ In addition, some CMS proponents tend to view emancipation as virtually impossible without a radically different form of organizational control, such as moving away from current forms of capitalism to communes, state ownership, collective ownership, and so on. Although I agree with those who find alternative forms of organizational control as more desirable than current ones, I am not prepared to draw such stark distinctions as emancipation versus no emancipation. I align with those who feel that there is a sizable gray area in between these two extremes that should be navigated, even as we collectively aim for alternative institutional forms in the long term. As Alvesson and Willmott (1996) argue,

Gains, however small, in terms of increased discretion and improved job satisfaction should be appreciated as such, and not be measured solely against Utopian visions of autonomy, creativity and democracy – visions that may have little meaning for the everyday life experiences and struggles of many organizational participants. The positive aspect of contemporary organizational transformation should not be disregarded or dismissed when drawing attention to its more sinister and oppressive features.
(Alvesson & Willmott, 1996:186)

⁴ It is also important to note that these benefits could be derived even if CMS scholars were uncomfortable with the idea of collaborating with corporations, as a great many OD consultants work in the not-for-profit and government sector.

⁵ It is important to note that a number of CMS scholars do engage in various forms of intervention and applied work, including working with unions and various anti-globalization groups. However, to the best of my knowledge, Voronov and Coleman's (2003) categorization of CMS as predominantly an academic and research-focused field is still accurate.

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Maxim Voronov is a Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of Organization and Leadership at Teachers College, Columbia University. His research interests include power and politics, strategizing and organization change. His work has appeared in *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, *Journal of Social Psychology*, and *The Learning Organization*, among others. E-mail: mv339@columbia.edu. After July 1, 2005, direct all correspondence to Maxim Voronov, Department of Marketing, International Business and Strategy, Faculty of Business, Brock University, 500 Glenridge Avenue, St. Catharines, Ontario, L2S 3A1, Canada; E-mail: mvoronov@brocku.ca.